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ABSTRACT

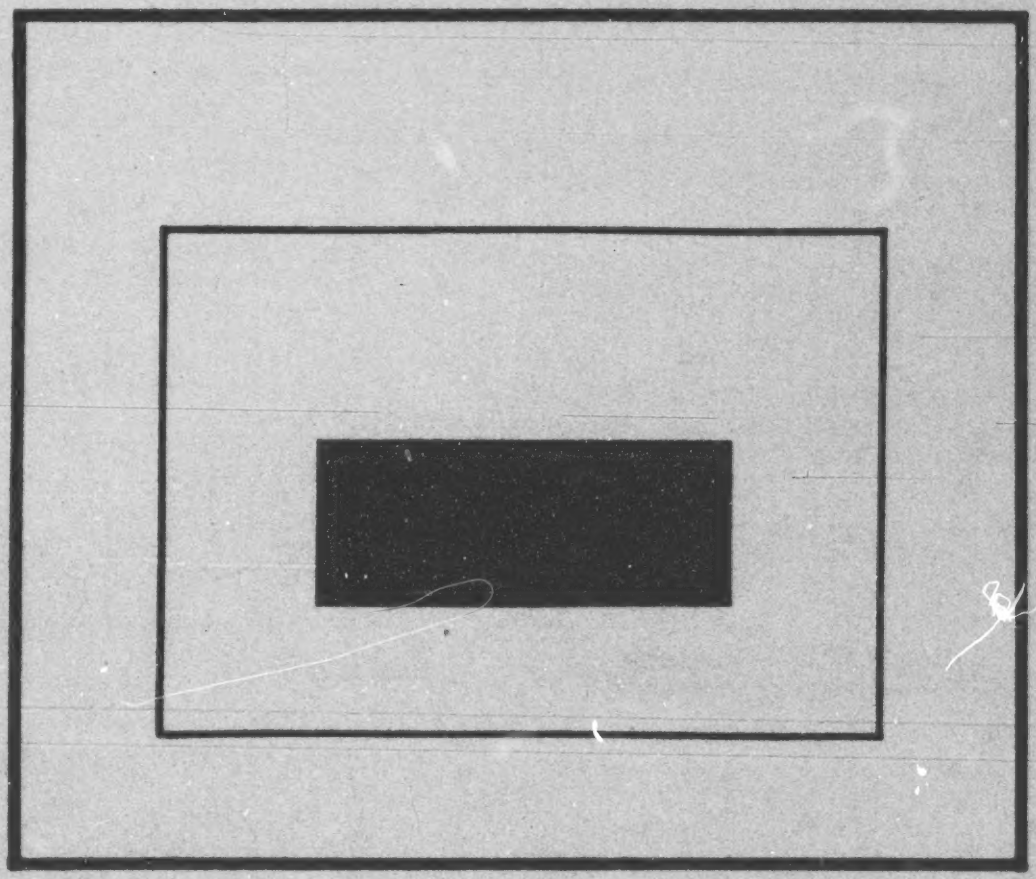
Basic questions about bilingual education are answered in this guide: (1) What is bilingual education? (2) Why have bilingual education? (3) Who is bilingual education for? (4) When should bilingual education begin? (5) How does a bilingual program start? A program design is provided, listing the methods by which a community may initiate bilingual education in a local school district, including guidelines for teacher selection and training, as well as methods for encouraging community participation. In addition, the most important research needs are cited. Sources of professional assistance and information and a list of materials centers and publications are included. (LG)

Center for Applied Linguistics

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

A Brief Guide to

BILINGUAL EDUCATION



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A BRIEF GUIDE TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION*

WHAT is bilingual education?

Bilingual education is not just education for bilinguals, nor is it merely an English as a Second Language program, although ESL is usually an essential part. It is an educational program in which two languages are mediums of instruction.

WHY have bilingual education?

Some questions of purpose still remain. Is bilingual education a good thing in itself, or is it a compensatory system, just to allow better transfer to English? Goals stressed by most proponents are improved self-concept, cognitive development, academic achievement, and socioeconomic level for members of minority groups in the United States, and the understanding and preservation of our collective and diverse national linguistic and cultural heritage.

Bilingual programs are not appropriate in all situations. Where non-English speakers are too few, or represent too many languages, or where the community decides against it, bilingual education may not be feasible or desirable. Here ESL programs, articulated with the rest of the curriculum, may be more educationally effective or desirable.

WHO is bilingual education for?

Bilingual education programs in the United States at present are primarily for children who do not speak English natively. They allow these children to continue their cognitive and linguistic growth in their first language while acquiring English as a second one. Bilingual education is also desirable for native English-speaking children. It can enable them to realize that there are other equally valid ways for expressing their ideas, and even more important, it can help them develop greater respect for their classmates who speak a different language.

WHEN should bilingual education begin?

Young children have an innate capacity for language learning that is greatly reduced when they get older. Native language habits become fixed after puberty and increasingly interfere with second language learning after that age. These facts suggest that bilingual education may be most successful if it is implemented very early in the school program. An early beginning can help eliminate the need for later remedial language instruction.

HOW does a bilingual education program start?

Programs can be proposed initially by either an individual or a group that recognizes a need for more effective instruction. School and community cooperation is essential. Experienced counsel should be sought from such sources as state, regional or national educational agencies and universities regarding planning and funding possibilities and procedures. One of the most common weaknesses of beginning bilingual programs is that they lack an adequate understanding of the linguistic dimensions of bilingual education. The advice of a linguist experienced in second language teaching, and familiar with the groups to be served, should therefore be sought. This is only the beginning. Great care must be given to the selection and training of personnel, acquisition or preparation of teaching materials, and other prerequisites to bilingual instruction.

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Program Design

The primary responsibility for the initiation of bilingual education programs in a school district lies with the school board and the superintendent. If they feel such a program warrants serious consideration, a suggested first step would be to appoint a representative advisory committee to study school and community conditions and decide on the feasibility of such an innovation. The function of the committee would be to provide liaison with the various elements in the community, and to conduct a survey to gather information on:

- the linguistic composition of the community;
- the socioeconomic status of speakers of each language;
- their educational achievement levels;
- their attitudes toward bilingual education.

At this stage an estimate can also be made of:

- the cost of implementing a bilingual program;
- the availability of facilities, materials, and trained personnel in the district;
- financial resources.

If the advisory committee, school board, and superintendent now feel that they are ready for a bilingual program, the next step would be to appoint a program coordinator. This is a vital person to the project and the following qualifications should be considered:

- Is he a fluent speaker of both languages?
- Is he sensitive to public relations?
- Does he understand children, schools, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, curriculum design, evaluation, and research?
- Is he recognized and respected by the board and the community?

The position of coordinator is fully as demanding as the qualifications suggest, since he will be responsible for:

- recommending principles, objectives, and program organization to the school board;
- recruiting bilingual teachers, aides, consultants and other personnel;
- conducting pre-service and in-service training of teachers and aides;
- curriculum design;
- materials preparation, selection, and adaptation;
- plan of evaluation;
- contacts with state and federal agencies concerned;
- public relations.

Administrators have several alternatives in program design to choose from when setting up a program. In making a choice, they should take several factors into account, including the community situation, school resources, and their basic purposes for initiating a bilingual education program.

One desirable plan would devote most of the school day to instruction in the native language during the kindergarten, first and second grades, and equal portions to both languages from third through eighth grades. In the early years, work in the second language would be focused primarily on developing linguistic skills (in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary), and would use special second-language teaching methods. The program would gradually phase into use of the second language as a medium of instruction and would pursue the development of language arts skills in both languages.

Such a plan would be recommended where the school is in or near a bilingual community and students would have the opportunity to use both languages in and out of school. Even if they speak only one language when they enter school in such an area, the second language will probably not sound entirely strange to them.

A balanced bilingual program such as the one described above requires bilingual teachers and aides, and instructional materials in both languages. It is not necessary, and probably not even desirable, for the same subjects to be taught in two languages. Reading should be introduced in the children's first language, and it is therefore obvious that such reading readiness skills as the recognition of sound-symbol relationships should also be introduced in the first language. Transfer to reading the second language should not be made until initial reading skills are well established--usually during the second grade.

Most concept development in such areas as science and social studies will probably take place in the dominant language of the children. Concepts need not be developed a second time in the second language, but new labels may be provided for them. A child who learns science in Spanish, for instance, may have English terms for the same concepts introduced during the ESL (English as a Second Language) period as partial content for the English language lessons. When concepts are taught twice, children tend to "tune out" the lessons in their second language; they learn not to listen, because the content information is redundant. But simply providing more labels in the second language does not seem to have this negative effect, and allows the children more flexibility in the event they later transfer to a school without a bilingual program or one in which there are different language divisions.

If the purpose of the program is only to make non-English-speaking children bilingual, more time can be devoted to instruction in English and the native language maintained in some subject area. In this plan, the first language of the children would still be sued for initial reading instruction with the transfer to reading in English delayed until second grade. This design is feasible for districts which lack sufficient bilingual personnel or resources to make a more balanced program possible, or in communities where the advantages of bilingual education have not been recognized.

The Selection and Training of Teachers

One of the biggest problems facing bilingual programs is the shortage of suitably trained teachers. Most bilingual teachers have received their own education and training entirely in English, and may experience some difficulty learning to teach in their other language. They have to teach subjects in a different language from the one in which they originally learned about them, and there is a shortage of helpful books and guidelines. It should be strongly emphasized that a teacher is not adequately qualified to teach language merely because it is his native tongue. The following requirements should be considered by those hiring teachers for bilingual education programs:

- willingness to participate in an innovative program;
- knowledge of the structures of both languages of instruction;
- general understanding of the nature of language, including acceptance and respect for regional and social variation in both languages;
- specific understanding of his own speech and the speech of the area in which he teaches;

- knowledge of methods for teaching a second language;
- understanding and acceptance of all cultures represented in the community;
- knowledge of the growth and devlopment patterns of children;
- competence to provide a good linguistic model, preferably in both languages. If a teacher is competent in only one language, he should be placed in a team-teaching situation, and should not teach in his weak language.

Teachers and aides for a new program may profitably be hired for the summer preceding the first year of bilingual instruction. During these months the program coordinator, with assistance from specialized consultants from universities, educational service centers, or state educational agencies, can conduct a training and preparation program, which would include the following areas:

- linguistics
- second language methodology
- curriculum design
- review and adaptation of available instructional material
- creation of new material
- language fluency development in non-English language
- practice teaching in a language other than English
- study of the cultures represented in the community, including their values, beliefs, child-rearing practices, and family structures

Principals of schools involved in the program, and teachers in the next grade level, should also be included in all planning and orientation sessions. It is crucial to the success of a program to have their sympathetic support and cooperation. Administrators, who may have to explain the program to outsiders, or who may have to make decisions regarding the use of specially-devised local achievement tests in place of state-approved tests, need to have information about the program, its goals, and its methods. Teachers from immediately succeeding grade levels need the same information, for they need to begin preparing well in advance to adjust their teaching and their expectations to fit the students they will receive the following year. A failure to adequately inform either group, by arousing unnecessary anxieties, may jeopardize the success of any program.

Community Participation

Community cooperation is vital to the success of bilingual education programs, primarily because of the effect its attitude will have on the language learning of the children. It is therefore very important for the schools to communicate with the community at all stages of planning and implementation. The purpose is not to sell a program, but to inform and promote understanding. If a majority of the community is unwilling to accept bilingual education, some members may still support it, at least for experimental purposes. Direct observation of the results of bilingual education will often convince people that it is useful. A variety of media can be used to keep the community informed:

- open meetings of school board in early stages with an expert in bilingual education present to answer questions
- news and feature items for newspapers, radio, and television in both languages
- speakers available for PTA's, service clubs, or church groups (all presentations should be in the language of the group)

- small pamphlet describing purposes and plans (prepared in both languages) and distributed where it can reach all segments of the community, e.g., in grocery stores, churches, and health clinics
- special invitations to community leaders to observe planning and training sessions and classrooms
- regular arrangement for members of the community (once the program is underway) to visit classes
- a newsletter sent home with students at regular intervals, including pictures of activities
- continuing communication between the school and community regarding both progress and problems

One of the most beneficial results of bilingual programs may well be the extent to which it allows parents to become involved in the formal education of their children. Administrators and teachers must work to bridge the traditional cultural gap between English-speaking schools and non-English-speaking homes. It is the job of the school to let the parents know that their participation is wanted, that it is needed, and to provide opportunities for communication. Some of the following steps may encourage parental involvement:

- notices and invitations in the language of the home;
- different and more conventient meeting times for PTA and similar activities;
- representation from all community groups in school-related organizations or councils;
- requests for help in preparing instructional materials (providing coffee and baby sitting, and showing parents the progress of the program and the way the materials they are helping prepare will be used in the classrooms, e.g., games, flash cards, flannel board stories);
- visits by teachers to pupils' homes (only if community wants this).

one of the most important factors in promoting parental involvement and better understanding between home and school is inherent in the nature of a bilingual program. The children are taught in the language of the home, and can express or apply what they have learned there. Experience has shown that when parents are in a position to understand what is going on at school, they are more likely to be supportive of the efforts of the school in the education of their children.

Needed Research

Basic research on the fundamental linguistic and cultural factors involved in bilingual/bicultural education is urgently needed if this promising movement is not to fail in its goals or run the risk of further impairing the educational opportunity of children from linguistic minority groups. Probably no other single major educational effort in this country has been carried on with so little information and so little basic research upon which to base it. Because the futures of thousands of children depent upon it, research in this area should receive priority attention.

The most important research needs which have been identified are given below. This information is needed as a basis for teacher training, curriculum design, materials preparation, test development and evaluation.

1. Sociolinguistic research on regional and social variation in the use of languages other than English spoken in the United States, especially Spanish.

2. Research on children's acquisition of the grammar of their native language to determine norms of acquisition for regional and socio-economic groups (as a basis for reading materials and tests development).

3. Reserach on the optimum age for second language learning, and linguistic and cultural variables affecting second language acquisition.

4. Research on linguistic, cultural, social and psychological aspects of bilingualism, including the linguistic, cognitive and affective consequences of different types of bilingualism.

5. Research on the effect of different instructional methods and models with different linguistic and cultural groups, different age groups, and rural versus urban groups.

6. Research on the effect of teacher attitudes on student achievement, the effect of bilingual teaching on student self-concept, and the effect of linguistically and anthropologically oriented teacher training on teacher behavior and student achievement.

7. For Native American groups, basic research on the grammar, lexicons and sound systems of many languages as a basis for instructional materials development, and analysis of differences between the native language and English to optimize teaching materials and strategies.

8. Research on the effect of bilingual education programs on school-community relations, and the community attitudes on school and language achievement.

9. Research on cultural differences in personal interaction behavior and appropriate modes of communication, including nonverbal communication, and the effect ofmismatch in instructional and testing situtations.

10. Additonal research on problems of transfer from native language reading to reading in English.

Bilingual education today is a world-wide phenomenon (often under the label 'vernacular education'), and is not at all confined merely to the United States. A number of countries, among them Mexico, India, and the Soviet Union, have a much longer history of experience in bilingual education, which should be drawn upon to extract examples of successful practices and to prevent the unnecessary repetition of past mistakes. The field of language planning, which encompasses bilingual education as one aspect, has accumulated a considerable fund of vitally significant knowledge and information. No one who is seriously concerned about bilingual education can afford to ignore these sources of information and accumulated experience.

Resources

Professional assistance and information:

Center for Applied Linguistics
Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program
1611 North Kent Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages)
School of Languages and Linguistics
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20007

Division of Bilingual Education
U.S. Office of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

International Center for Research on Bilingualism
Cite Universitaire
Quebec 10, P.Q., Canada

Center for Applied Linguistics
ERIC/CLL
1611 North Kent Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Materials Centers:

Bilingual Education Service Center
101 North Owen Street
Mount Prospect, Illinois 60056

The Center for the Study of Migrant and Indian Education
P.O. Box 329
Toppenish, Washington 98948

Dissemination Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Education
6504 Tracor Lane
Austin, Texas 78721

Materials Acquisition Project
2950 National Avenue
San Diego, California 92113

Spanish Curricula Development Center
Dade County Public Schools
1420 Washington Avenue
Miami Beach, Florida 33139

Materials Centers: (Continued)

Project BEST
Hunter College
Box 93
695 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Publications:

The Linguistic Reporter, Published monthly except July and August by the Center for Applied Linguistics. Subscription $2.50 a year.

TESOL Quarterly, Publiched by TESOL four times a year. Subscription including membership, $10.00 a year.